

# **NATIONAL LITERATURE AS A TOOL IN FORMING NATIONAL UNITY: A STUDY OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE PROGRAM (MNSP) PARTICIPANTS**

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The Malaysian National Service Program (MNSP) was introduced in 2004. It was aimed at forming a disciplined society, true spirit, self confidence, faithful towards the nation, prepared to face any trial and challenges, as well as to inculcate and foster cooperation and unity among all the ethnic groups in the country. MNSP is carried out from the Malaysian perspective to achieve the country's need. Following that, the four modules of exercises include physical aspect, character building, nationalism and community service.

## **Statement of Problem**

The Language and Literature Program (LLP) in MNSP is aimed at expanding the knowledge and understanding among the trainees on the importance of national language and literature (Malay Literature) for the purpose of building the spirit of goodwill among the main ethnic groups in Malaysia (Hasanul Isyraf Mohammad, 2007). In this program, the collection of poems 'Tanah Airku' was chosen as the compulsory text for the entire MNSP participants. This is to foster cultural understanding followed by inculcating the spirit of goodwill among each other. It will be carried out as a group exercise. The trainer will guide the group to learn the national elements such as country, nation and people, culture and religions from that anthology. The anthology will be used as the main source for the presentation in MNSP Culture and Literature Performance Night.

The study on the effectiveness of LLP in transforming of national unity among the MNSP participants has found to be vital. The LLP is an important mechanism to encourage and transform the attitude of MNSP participants and make them show interest in literature and Malay culture because this is of utmost importance in forming national culture and literature. Apart from the formal Malaysian national education, MNSP is the other platform for all youths from the various main ethnic groups of Malaysia, religions and cultures to form the ultimate national unity. The MNSP involved almost all the youths who have sat for their SPM (Malaysian Certificate of Education) examination.

## **Objectives**

This study is aimed at the collection of detailed data on the effectiveness of language and literature program in fostering the understanding and national unity among the various ethnic groups of MNSP participants in Malaysia through the national literature mechanism. There are characteristics of literature on the ethnic group's relationship in the poem anthology "Tanah Airku". Examples of the relationship are ethnic relation, cultural interaction, understanding of religion and love for the country. Therefore this study is aimed at evaluating the involvement among each participant on the planned activities in the Literature and Cultural Night. Their feedback on the appreciation of the literary work especially poem will be the tool and mechanism for national unity.

## **Research Question**

1. How is the acceptance among National Service participant towards the appropriateness of the anthology of poems *Tanah Airku* (2005) as the text book of the performance in the Literary and Cultural Night?



2. Do the participants enjoy watching/involving themselves in the performance in the Literary and Cultural Night and what is their reason?
3. Do the participants agree that the Literary and Cultural Night gave positive and good effect in the fostering the unity of harmonious relationship among them?

### Conceptual Framework

The approach used in this study is the application of Literary Unity Theory (Chew, 2007) to determine the acceptance among the national service participants towards the anthology of poems *Tanah Airku* (2005) as the main text for reading. According to the theory, the main aspect in the study is to examine their perception, opinion and thought because literature is written for all the audiences. Therefore the main target and focus in this study is the reading of the text and author. The researcher has to choose those respondents who will be represented in the study as they could give the correct feedback towards the LLP modules especially the Literary and Cultural Night.

### Methodology

This study is the evaluation towards the literary module program with the usage of anthology of poems, *Tanah Airku* (2005) in the Malaysian National Service. This study will be conducted in three states followed by zone, that is Pahang to represent east cost of Malaysia, Melaka represents west cost of Malaysia and Sarawak represents East Malaysia. There are three National Service camps selected for this study, namely The Gambang National Service Camp, Pahang; the Recreation Jungle Camp of Ayer Keroh, Malacca and Sematan National Service Camp of Kuching, Sarawak. The sample size selected is 393 respondents from the total of 560 national service participants.

The instrument in this study comprises two sections of questionnaire, namely Section A consisting of the demographic aspects of respondents which include race, gender, parental income, and domicile whereas Section B consist of three open questions on the participants' opinion on the usage of *Tanah Airku* (2005) in the Literary and Cultural Night presentation. Those questions are general in nature and the questions concern the enjoyment of the presentation night, the success of the Literary and Cultural Night presentation as well as the effects of the presentation.

### Findings

A total of 63.44% of the national service participants agree that the anthology of poems *Tanah Airku* (2005) is suitable for use as the text for the presentation at the Literary and Cultural Night because they found that the text sow the patriotism and loyalty to country spirit among them. A total of 52.16% of the participant agreed that the Literary and Cultural Night gave positive and good effect in fostering the unity of harmonious relationship among the ethnic races in Malaysia. The Literary and Cultural Night presentation is the platform for them to interact, fostering good relationship, unity among all races and cooperation to make the presentation a success.

This is a rare opportunity for all the MNSP participants especially the non Malay. Having experienced their schools' closed environment on cultural activities due to the academic and public examination centered approach, the participants will definitely find LLP as eye and mind opener for all the MNSP participant on the Malaysian cultural diversification, religion and beliefs coupled with the various ethnic language used by the various races in Malaysia.

A total of 64.89% of the respondents agreed that they felt enjoyment when participating or being in the audience during the cultural shows. They benefited by getting knowledge and appreciation of the culture and religion of other races, other than gaining experiences and new knowledge when participating in the performances and poem recital.



## Discussion and Conclusion

The result of this study shows that LLP is in fact successful in fostering friendship and brotherhood among the various ethnic groups in the MNSP participants. The result reinforces the findings of Wan Faizal Wan Mahzir (2004/2005), Maliki Brahim and colleagues (2006), Zahari Ishak and Lihana Borhan (2007). All show that through the community service module, nation building and National Service, all participants concerned would know and mingle and be close with each other. These studies mentioned the program as being successful in fostering racial unity and realization of social consciousness as well as inculcating the spirit of nationalism.

Even though the above mentioned three studies did not narrow down towards the national literature, the results of this study show that national literature will play its role in fostering the harmonious relationship and integration among races in Malaysia through LLP. In this perspective, Whitehead (1990), Fine, Weis, and Powell (1997) have shown that by using a good literary work, the youth will be less prejudiced and more tolerant towards the ethnicity and other races who form the bulk of population of Malaysia.

This study resembled that conducted by Fine et al. (1997) which showed that teachers and students have supported the literature in various cultures of the world in Clear Mount High School. It also shows the students the various culture and literature in one particular group. Therefore LLP should be continued. It fosters and builds understanding among the different ethnic groups and would create a united Malaysian nation.

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